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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes of non-disabled persons toward physically disabled persons. The degree of impairment, sex of stimulus persons, and sex of subjects were the independent variables. The subjects consisted of 120 psychology students from Kent State University, Ashtabula Regional Campus. Each subject viewed one of six videotaped conditions depicting a job interview situation in which the person being interviewed was either a male stimulus person or a female stimulus person displaying either no disability (control situation), a mild physical disability, or a severe physical disability. The findings in this study were unexpected. The results indicated a more favorable attitude toward a physically disabled person than toward a normal person. This implies that a sympathy effect is operating. The sex of the stimulus person and the sex of the subjects did not yield significant results. It can be concluded that the favorable attitude exhibited toward the stimulus persons in the present study tends to indicate that the physically disabled, when they are attempting to fulfill the expectations of the non-disabled, are met with sympathy rather than rejection. (Author)

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ATTITUDES TOWARD THE PHYSICALLY DISABLED

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The primary purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes of non-disabled persons toward physically disabled persons. The degree of impairment, sex of stimulus persons, and sex of subjects were the independent variables. The subjects consisted of 120 psychology students from Kent State University, Ashtabula Regional Campus. Each subject viewed one of six video taped conditions depicting a job interview situation in which the person being interviewed was either a male stimulus person or a female stimulus person displaying either no disability (control situation), a mild physical disability, or a severe physical disability.

The findings in this study were unexpected. The results indicated a more favorable attitude toward a physically disabled person than toward a normal person. This implies that a sympathy effect is operating. The sex of the stimulus person and the sex of the subjects did not yield significant results.

It can be concluded that the favorable attitude exhibited toward the stimulus persons in the present study tends to indicate that the physically disabled, when they are attempting to fulfill the expectations of the nondisabled, are met with sympathy rather than rejection.

ATTITUDES TOWARD THE PHYSICALLY DISABLED

Prior research has shown that interaction patterns between people are related to social attraction and the basic processes of liking or disliking others. An antecedent of interpersonal attraction according to Festinger, Schachter, and Back (1950:155) is propinquity. All other things being equal, people who are closer to an individual are better liked by that individual than are people who are at a distance. This notion is reinforced by Homans (1950:11) who hypothesizes "that people who interact frequently with one another tend to like one another," and this increased liking leads to an increase in interaction between the individuals.

It would appear that this process is deflected in the physically disabled in that all things are <u>not</u> equal. When attitudes toward disabled persons are compared with attitudes toward nondisabled, an overwhelming amount of research suggests that people perceive the disabled person as being considerably "different" from the nondisabled person (Barker, 1948; Best, 1967; Chesler, 1965; Cruickshank, 1948; DuBrow, 1965; Force, 1956; Genskow and Maglione, 1965; Goodman and Dornbusch, 1963; Kutner, 1971; MacDonald and Hall, 1969; Sussman, 1969).

Wright (1960) states that disabled people are "given a social status comparable to that of an underprivileged minority group." Results from a study by Siller, et.al. (1969), suggest that attitudes toward the physically disabled are less favorable than attitudes toward the so-called normal or nondisabled person.

Meyerson (1948) pinpointed the major problem of the physically disabled person indicating that social and psychological problems are more major than physical problems. Meyerson pointed out that deviations from the social norms of physical attractiveness result in negative attitudes toward the physically disabled person. Movies and television programs often have characterized the villains with some type of physical disability. Advertisements stress the physical attractiveness of their stimulus person. Therefore, it can be argued that society learns to reinforce physical attractiveness and to punish and to stigmatize physical disability. "A sound mind in a sound body" implies "a crooked mind in a croked body" (Meyerson, 1948:3).

These societal notions are reflected in attitudes toward the physically disabled. Feinberg (1967) found that social desirability influenced the attitudes of undergraduates toward the disabled. Numerous other authors (Goffman, 1963; Nunnally, 1960; Wright, 1960) have pointed out that a physical disability creates an atmosphere of prejudice toward the physically disabled person. The presence of negative attitudes toward the physically disabled was also found by Chessler (1965) and Yuker (1965).

In further examining the underlying causes for the presence of negative attitudes toward the physically disabled, Best (1967:3) suggests that nondisabled persons develop a baseline attitude toward physically disabled persons and perceive them as "social liabilities or non-comparables." This notion of non-comparability follows from Festinger's (1954:120) theory of social comparison processes in that an individual has a tendency to compare himself with some other specific person in order to evaluate his own abilities. Reynolds (1960) indicates that this is one

important means of self-evaluation. Festinger (1954:120) goes on to state, "a person does not tend to evaluate his opinions or his abilities by comparison with others who are too divergent from himself.... There is then a tendency not to make the comparison." Thus the disabled person is considered socially undesirable, not even useful as a point of comparison, and certainly "different."

In addition, people tend to like able and competent people (Iverson, 1964). Often the disabled are viewed by others and themselves as performing poorly on tasks (Kutner, 1970). The disabled are generally considered socially worthless (Johannsen, 1969). It is, therefore, hypothesized that normals or nondisabled persons will have more favorable attitudes toward nondisabled persons than toward persons exhibiting a disability.

The second hypothesis is concerned with the degree of impairment, mild or severe. Because of the above it is hypothesized that a physically disabled person demonstrating a mild degree of impairment will receive more favorable attitudes than will a person exhibiting a severe physical disability.

The primary purpose of this study is, then, to examine the attitudes of nondisabled persons toward disabled persons. This study will also investigate whether the degree of impairment, mild or severe, has an effect upon the attitudes of nondisabled persons toward the physically disabled person.

Design

A 3x2x2 factorial design was used. The independent variables consisted of type of disability: severe, mild, or normal; sex of stimulus

person; and sex of subject. The dependent variables included three attitude scales: the Social Distance Scale (Bogradus, 1933), the Attitude Toward Employment Scale (Kirchner, 1952, 1957), and the Attitude Toward Disabled Persons Scale (Yuker, 1960, 1966). All three attitude scales used a 7-point Likert-type method.

The dependent variables were analyzed by analysis of variance procedures. The sum of the items on each scale was analyzed for significant main effects and interaction effects. Each scale was factor analyzed for factor loadings. Each factor was then analyzed separately for significant main effects and interaction effects.

Experimental Conditions

Each subject viewed one of 6 different videotape segments. The segments viewed by each subject were randomly assigned. Four of the videotape segments dealt with physical disability and their degree of impairment, mild or severe, and sex of stimulus person, male or female. One condition showed a tape of the male stimulus person with a mild physical disability -- a paralyzed right arm. Another condition depicted the male stimulus person displaying a severe physical disability -- cerebral palsy. The same two conditions were repeated with a female stimulus person. The normal condition served as the control. The control consisted of either a male or a female stimulus person with no apparent physical disability.

Results

There is some relationship between the three dependent variables used in this study. The Social Distance Scale and the Attitudes Toward Employment Scale are moderately related ($r = .50$). Each of these scales

is inversely related to the Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons Scale (r = - .30 and r = -.17, respectively). For purposes of the present analysis, however, each of the scales that were used as dependent variables will be analyzed separately.

Social Distance Scale

The analysis of variance performed on the sum of the responses to the items on the social distance scale indicates that the subjects reacted differently to the various independent manipulations. As can be seen in Table 1, there is a strong main effect with regard to disability impairment, $F = 12.25$, $df = 2/108$, $p < .001$. The other two independent variables had no apparent effect on the dependent variable.

TABLE 1. Analysis of Variance for Summation of Social Distance Scale Items

Source	df	F	p <
Disability Impairment	2	12.25	.001
Sex of Stimulus Person	1	.05	n.s.
Sex of Subject	1	.51	n.s.
Disability X Sex of Stimulus Person	2	.05	n.s.
Disability X Sex of Subject	2	1.24	n.s.
Sex of Stimulus Person X Sex of Subject	1	.09	n.s.
Disability X Sex of Stimulus Person X Sex of Subject	2	2.26	n.s.
Error	108		

Examining the means for the two levels of physical disability and the control group we find lower means, indicating a more favorable attitude on the Social Distance Scale, for the physically disabled as shown in Table 2. Using a t-test for the difference of means it can be seen that both degrees of physical disability are significantly different from the control. They are not, however, significantly different from each other.

TABLE 2. Means on the Social Distance Scale

Type	Mean
(1) Normal	29.18
(2) Mild Physical	24.23
(3) Severe Physical	21.48

$t_{12} = 2.84$ $p < .01$

$t_{23} = 1.74$ n.s.

$t_{13} = 5.41$ $p < .001$

In order to further examine the processes at work, the Social Distance Scale was factor analyzed. One factor accounted for 42 percent of the explained variance and 6 of the 11 items that comprise the scale load strongly into this factor. Two other factors account for an additional 29 percent (18 percent and 11 percent each) of the explained variance. These two factors consist primarily of two and three items respectively. The factor loadings for these three scales are given in Table 3. The first factor is a basic social distance factor dealing

TABLE 3. Item Loadings on the Social Distance Factors

Item	Factor One	Factor Two	Factor Three
Intimate Friend	.26	-.02	.79
Close kin by marriage	.53	-.14	.45
Depending on sex roommate/date	.00	-.04	.81
Personal friend in my club	.39	.21	.72
My neighbor	.70	.11	.41
Husband's or wife's friend	.74	.05	.39
Live in same apartment	.86	.00	.07
Speaking acquaintance	.82	.25	.03
Rent property	.64	.32	.14
Exclude from neighborhood	.09	.95	.00
Exclude from University	.17	.92	.00

with positive social contact primarily at an acquaintance or friendship level. The second factor focuses on exclusion from contact items and the third factor concerns intimate, close relationships.

Additional analyses of variance were performed using the factor scores from each of these three factors as the dependent variable. The results remained the same as when the sum of all the scale items was used, that is, there is a strong main effect of disability impairment. In addition, with the second and third factors there is an interactive effect of impairment, sex of the actor, and sex of the subject. Tables 4 and 5 present the results for factors two and three.

TABLE 4. Analysis of Variance for Factor Two of the Social Distance Scale

Source	df	F	p <
Disability Impairment	2	8.65	.001
Sex of Stimulus Person	1	0.24	n.s.
Sex of Subject	1	2.22	n.s.
Disability X Sex of Stimulus Person	2	0.34	n.s.
Disability X Sex of Subject	2	1.42	n.s.
Sex of Stimulus Person X Sex of Subject	1	1.55	n.s.
Disability X Sex of Stimulus Person X Sex of Subject	2	3.41	.05
Error	108		

TABLE 5. Analysis of Variance for Factor Three of the Social Distance Scale

Source	df	F	p <
Disability Impairment	2	6.40	.005
Sex of Stimulus Person	1	0.17	n.s.
Sex of Subject	1	2.45	n.s.
Disability X Sex of Stimulus Person	2	0.08	n.s.
Disability X Sex of Subject	2	1.97	n.s.
Sex of Stimulus Person X Sex of Subject	1	0.06	n.s.
Disability X Sex of Stimulus Person X Sex of Subject	2	4.18	.01
Error	108		

Attitudes Toward Employment Scale

An analysis of variance was carried out using the Attitudes Toward Employment Scale as the dependent variable. Table 6 shows that none of the independent variables affected the attitudes of the subjects toward

TABLE 6. Analysis of Variance for Summation of Attitudes Toward Employment Scale Items

Source	df	F	p <
Disability Impairment	2	1.95	n.s.
Sex of Stimulus Person	1	1.15	n.s.
Sex of Subject	1	0.69	n.s.
Disability X Sex of Stimulus Person	2	2.12	n.s.
Disability X Sex of Subject	2	1.92	n.s.
Sex of Stimulus Person X Sex of Subject	1	0.36	n.s.
Disability X Sex of Stimulus Person X Sex of Subject	2	0.26	n.s.
Error	108		

the employment of people possessing physical disabilities.

Table 7 gives the means for the sums of the individual items on the Attitudes Toward Employment Scale for each disability. A low mean indicates a favorable attitude toward a disabled person and a higher mean

TABLE 7. Means on the Attitude Toward Employment Scale

Type	Mean
(1) Normal	36.63
(2) Mild Physical	33.75
(3) Severe Physical	32.85

$t_{12} = 1.37$ n.s.

$t_{23} = 0.43$ n.s.

$t_{13} = 1.94$ n.s.

suggests a more unfavorable attitude toward a person with a disability. These results indicate a tendency toward a sympathy effect toward a person with a physical disability although the means are not statistically significant from each other.

A factor analysis was then performed on this scale and two factors were found. The first accounted for 43 percent of the explained variance and the second accounted for an additional 12 percent of the variance. The individual item loadings on the Employment Scale are reported in Table 8. As can be seen, most of the items load into the first factor.

TABLE 8. Item Loadings on the Attitude Toward Employment Factors

Item	Factor One	Factor Two
Pick for the job	.66	-.28
Work of higher quality	.64	-.23
Grouchy on the job	.64	.24
Cooperate more on the job	.70	.44
Happier on the job	.78	.22
More dependable	.77	.07
Not have speed needed	.48	-.55
Higher wages	.22	-.59
Would hire	.80	-.15
Too set in own way to change	.52	.41
Made a good employee	.77	-.08

The second factor includes essentially two items. These items refer to the perceived lack of speed and the need for higher wages of the physically disabled and are not indicators of social rejection.

An analysis of variance was performed using these two factors as measures of the dependent variable. The second factor did not yield significant results. As shown in Table 9, the independent variable, severity of physical disability, did have an effect on the first factor of the

TABLE 9. Analysis of Variance for the First Factor of Attitudes Toward Employment Scale

Source	df	F	p <
Disability Impairment	2	6.34	.005
Sex of Stimulus Person	1	0.49	n.s.
Sex of Subject	1	0.29	n.s.
Disability X Sex of Stimulus Person	2	2.00	n.s.
Disability X Sex of Subject	2	3.58	.05
Sex of Stimulus Person X Sex of Subject	1	1.41	n.s.
Disability X Sex of Stimulus Person X Sex of Subject	2	0.27	n.s.
Error	108		

scale of attitudes toward employment ($F = 6.34$, $df = 2/108$, $p < .005$). In addition, the interaction of impairment and sex of subject also had an effect on the dependent variable ($F = 3.58$, $df = 2/108$, $p < .05$).

Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons Scale

A factor analysis performed on the Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons Scale points out six factors which account for 45 percent of the variance. Factor one has high reliability and accounts for 15 percent of the variance explained. The item loadings on the six factors are reported in Table 10. For the first factor, twenty one of the thirty items are above the .30 minimum. This factor appears to be dealing with the perception of

TABLE 10. Item Loadings on Six Factors from the Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons Scale

Item	1st Factor	2nd Factor	3rd Factor	4th Factor	5th Factor	6th Factor
*Unfriendly	.50	-.10	.12	-.41	.15	-.20
Should not compete for jobs with normals	.28	.11	.56	-.27	-.09	-.09
*More emotional	.58	.12	.15	-.11	-.23	-.22
*More self-conscious	.32	.61	-.10	.13	-.09	.15
Should expect as much	.00	.08	.46	.00	.30	.25
*Cannot be as successful	.46	-.21	.07	-.61	-.26	.10
*No contribution	.50	-.33	-.09	-.20	-.32	.18
*Nondisabled not want to marry disabled	.11	.01	.15	-.59	-.03	.36
*Show as much enthusiasm	.50	-.29	-.28	.01	-.07	.20
*More sensitive	.20	.62	.22	-.18	-.31	.00
*Untidy	.45	.10	-.34	-.10	.00	-.30
As good as others	.13	.19	-.23	-.15	.29	-.49
*Driving test more severe	.31	.39	-.21	-.02	-.31	-.29
*Sociable	.42	-.28	.28	-.03	.16	.07
Not as conscientious	.25	-.38	-.03	.19	-.03	-.30
Probably worry more	.26	.15	-.28	.00	.08	.36
Not dissatisfied with self	.09	.27	.16	.19	.23	-.08

TABLE 10, continued

Item	1st Factor	2nd Factor	3rd Factor	4th Factor	5th Factor	6th Factor
*More misfits	.57	.11	-.14	.06	.41	-.19
*Not get discouraged easily	.36	.21	.13	.53	.29	.14
Disabled children should compete with normal	.00	.40	.46	.19	-.02	-.11
*Resent normals	.46	.12	-.10	.07	.39	-.02
*Take care of self	.35	-.09	.43	.38	-.11	-.03
*Live and work with nondisabled	.32	-.25	.43	.15	-.34	-.36
*As ambitious	.42	-.34	-.08	.29	-.35	.02
*As self-confident	.44	.36	-.16	.24	-.08	.24
*Want more affection and praise	.35	.42	.00	-.14	-.24	.18
*Less intelligent	.60	-.12	.14	-.17	.21	-.12
*Not want more sympathy	.51	-.04	.07	-.32	.26	.23
*Are different	.36	-.09	-.11	.36	-.14	.26
*Irritating	.47	-.29	.00	.13	.28	.13

Note: * indicates those items on Factor I only which reached the .30 minimum level.

personality characteristics with regard to disabled persons.

An analysis of variance performed on the six factors from the Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons Scale shows that the perception of personality characteristics factor is the only factor indicating any significant

TABLE 11. Analysis of Variance for Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons Perception of Personality Characteristics Factor

Source	df	F	p <
Disability Impairment	2	2.72	n.s.
Sex of Stimulus Person	1	0.19	n.s.
Sex of Subject	1	2.14	n.s.
Disability X Sex of Stimulus Person	2	3.89	.05
Disability X Sex of Subject	2	1.95	n.s.
Sex of Stimulus Person X Sex of Subject	1	0.02	n.s.
Disability X Sex of Stimulus Person X Sex of Subject	2	0.16	n.s.
Error	108		

results. The analysis of variance on this factor, presented in Table 11, indicates that only the interaction effect of disability impairment and sex of stimulus person had an effect ($F = 3.89$, $df = 2/108$, $p < .05$).

Summary of Results

The findings in this study were unexpected. The results from the Social Distance Scale show a significantly more favorable attitude toward a physically disabled person than toward a normal person. Furthermore, the severe physical disability was viewed more favorably than the mild disability although the difference was not statistically significant. This seems to imply that a "sympathy" effect is operating.

The Attitudes Toward Employment Scale further reinforces the notion of a sympathy effect. The comparison of means does not actually show a significant difference between attitudes toward a normal person and attitudes toward a physically disabled person, but the numerical differences in means indicates this sympathy effect. The factor, perception of personality characteristics, which was the only significant factor extracted from the Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons Scale, also shows support for the sympathy effect. Positive attitudes toward a disabled person are enhanced by exposure to a physically disabled person. The sympathy effect is unexpected, since previous research strongly supports the position that a person with a physical disability receives negative attitudes.

In examining the second hypothesis, namely, that a mild degree of impairment will receive a more favorable response than a severe impairment, no significant differences were found between the mild and severe conditions. Furthermore, the sex of the stimulus person and the sex of the subjects did not yield significant results.

Discussion and Conclusions

The present findings required a re-examination of previous research. Genskow and Maglione (1965) did find that a sample of students who had a greater likelihood of contact with disabled persons exhibited greater acceptance of disabled persons than did a sample who had little or no contact with disabled persons. Furthermore, the strongest results in the present study are with the Social Distance Scale and MacDonald and Hall (1969:658) found "that the nondisabled generally perceived disabilities as being less debilitating socially than elsewhere." Thus there is previous research tending in the direction of the present results.

Another explanation for our results lies in the setting that was chosen for the script used as a stimulus. The disabled persons are shown in a job interview situation. Merton (1957:166-167) indicates that monetary success is "firmly entrenched in American culture." Social success is, thus, based on the accumulation of wealth. In this context, people who are non-productive are social liabilities. The physically disabled are thought to be handicapped in their productive capacities and are classified as a group in this respect (Best, 1967:3). The physically disabled stimulus persons in the present study are in a setting in which they are in the process of attempting to become "productive" and are, therefore, not classified as a member of the group of non-productive people who "deserve" to be negatively sanctioned because of their violation of a norm of the culture.

In conclusion, the favorable attitude exhibited toward the stimulus persons in the present study tends to indicate that the physically disabled, when they are attempting to fulfill the expectations of the non-disabled, are met with sympathy rather than rejection.

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